Association between Suggestion Speech Act and Language Proficiency, Gender, and Verbal Intelligence among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract
This study was an attempt to investigate Iranian EFL learners' use of suggestion speech acts concerning factors such as language proficiency, gender, and verbal intelligence. With this aim, 105 Iranian EFL learners participated in this study. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to produce data related to the suggestion forms utilized by the participants. Percentage and chi-square tests were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that different language proficiency levels did not produce any significant difference in the production suggestion speech act. However, participants' performance considering different gender reached statistical significance. Also, verbal intelligence proved to be a significant factor in using suggestion forms among Iranian EFL learners.

Keywords: Suggestion Speech Act, Language Proficiency, Gender, Verbal Intelligence, EFL Learners

1. Introduction

The teaching and acquisition of second-language words and phrases have evolved to prioritize communicative competence, emphasizing the importance of considering the sociocultural context in language instruction. Isolating language elements from their sociocultural context may lead to pragmatic failure, hindering effective communication (Rose & Kasper,

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2001). In line with this perspective, Kasper and Rose (2002) argue that effective communication in both second and first languages extends beyond grammatical proficiency. It involves the constant decision-making process of selecting from numerous alternative ways to express ideas. Shih (2006) further highlights that foreign language speakers who possess grammatical competence but lack sociolinguistic awareness may encounter communication problems with native speakers, as they struggle to use sociolinguistic rules appropriately and interpret words accurately.

The significance of pragmatics in language communication becomes evident when observing the perplexed reaction of a native English professor upon receiving the expression "I'm ashamed" as a supposed expression of gratitude from an Iranian student (Sharifian, 2004). This anecdote underscores the importance of integrating discussions on communicative competence with grammatical competence (Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990). The literature consistently reports that the development of grammatical competence alone does not ensure the development of pragmatic competence (Niezgoda & Röver, 2001). Consequently, Schmidt and Richards (1980, as cited in Pishghadam & Sharafadini, p. 153) argue that "speech act theory provides a suitable framework for explaining language use".

Research (Shahrokhi & Khodadadi, 2023) highlights the significance of pragmatics in language learning, demonstrating its vital role in successful communication within the English language classroom. Their findings emphasize the need for explicit instruction and practice in pragmatic skills to foster effective communication. This study aligns with the growing body of literature highlighting the importance of pragmatics in language education, supporting the notion that pragmatic competence plays a critical role in achieving communicative goals.

2. Literature Review

A review of the pertinent literature that could serve as the theoretical frame work of the current study is provided as follows.

2.1. Interlanguage Pragmatics

It is crystal clear that "Pragmatics is not an easy term to define" (Ellis, 2008, p. 159). Perhaps to find a ready-made and handy definition of pragmatics, it is best to consult Yule's (1996) introductory account of the discipline. That gives us a chance to assert that "Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning", "Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning" and finally "Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said" (p.3).

It is worthwhile to quote Stalnaker's (1972) classical definition of Pragmatics (cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 2002, p. 182) as "the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed". This focuses our attention on the *context*, in which linguistic acts are performed. In one view, context is argued to include the participants – their identities, beliefs, knowledge, and intentions – as well as the temporal and spatial parameters of the speech event (Levinson, 1983). Also, Johnson and Johnson (1998), in their dictionary of applied linguistics, refer to Pragmatics as the interpretation of meaning in its linguistic and non-linguistic context. Here, Linguistic context is defined as "co-text" and "intertext" while the non-linguistic context includes "relationships between participants, their attitudes and emotions, their inferencing procedures, their cultural and world knowledge, their perception of the situation and their paralanguage" (p. 249). Similarly, Liu (2004) by distinguishing "the informative intent or sentence meaning" from "the communicative intent or speaker meaning" (p. 477) emphasizes the role of meaning and speaker's intention in a definition of Pragmatics. However, he limits its scope to the comprehension and production of speech acts and communicative acts, what Kasper and Dahl (1991) call the "narrow sense" of Pragmatics.

Claiming an "action-theoretical" perspective on Pragmatics, Kasper, and Blum-Kulka (1993) define it as "the study of people's comprehension and production of linguistic action in context" (p. 3). In this definition, they are generalizing Pragmatics from the second language learner to all users of language while confining the study of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) to learners of a second language. Bardovi-Harlig (2002) takes a similar position and attributes a narrower scope to Pragmatics within the study of second language acquisition (SLA) than the study of Pragmatics in its turn.

Interlanguage Pragmatics researchers have addressed a notably wide range of variables in their studies up to now. This includes but is not limited to, the roles of (in alphabetical order) age of enrollment/ immigration, exposure, feedback, first language and culture, grammatical competence, individual differences (including age, gender, motivation, social and psychological distance), input, instruction, interaction, L2 proficiency, learning context, length of residence, method of data collection, noticing and understanding, and transfer (Rose & Kasper, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper &Roever, 2005; AlcónSoler& Martinez-Flor, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Tajeddin, 2008). Nevertheless, we should remember that this list is by no means claimed to be a comprehensive one and can go on.

2.2. Suggestion Speech Acts

Speech act behavior constitutes an area of continual concern for language learners since they are repeatedly faced with the need to utilize speech acts such as complaints, apologies, invitations, and requests. Second language teachers may find that an understanding of speech act theory and practice will improve their ability to prepare their learners to meet the challenge of producing more contextually appropriate speech in the target language. Empirical research conducted on different speech acts abounds in the literature which can provide us with a better understanding and new insights into the interdependence of linguistic forms and sociocultural context. However, the speech act of suggestion has been given short shrift (Fernandez Guerra & Martinez-Flor, 2005).

According to Searle (1969), suggestions belong to the group of directive speech acts which are those in which the speaker's purpose is to get the hearer to commit him/herself to some future course of action. As Rintell (1979) states, in a suggestion, the speaker asks the hearer to take some action that the speaker believes will benefit the hearer, even one that the speaker should desire.

Banerjee and Carrell (1988) were the first scholars to conduct research specifically designed to focus on suggestions. By employing a discourse completion test (DCT) consisting of 60 situations that elicited a suggestion, these authors compared two groups of subjects, namely those of Chinese and Malay ESL students with 12 native speakers (NSs) of American English. Results from the study were analyzed both quantitatively, as far as frequency, directness, and type of suggestion employed, and qualitatively, regarding the use of politeness strategies and redressive forms when suggesting. The authors found that NSs made suggestions more frequently than non-native speakers (NNSs), and the type of suggestion used depended on the directness of the situation. Focusing on the speech act of suggestion, Koike and Pearson (2005) applied explicit pre-instruction and feedback versus implicit ones to two experimental groups and provided them with similar exercises to accomplish. The results showed that the explicit group performed significantly better in the multiple-choice items of the post-test, while the implicit group outperformed the other experimental group in open-ended dialogues. However, the delayed post-test did not show congruent results. Koike and Pearson concluded that instruction and feedback, in any form, work significantly better in developing L2 pragmatics, although they were not able to gain certain distinguishing results between these two types.

Pishghadam and Sharafadini (2011) compared the similarities and differences in the production of suggestion acts between English natives

and Persian natives. Additionally, they investigated the impact of gender on using, different kinds of suggestion strategies. A total number of 150 Iranian university students participated in their studies and were studying different majors such as mechanical engineering, civil engineering, statistics, politics, history, and social sciences. The instrument they used for their study was a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisting of six situations and participants were required to imagine themselves in the situations and respond as they would say in their daily conversations. The DCT was a Persian version of an English DCT devised by the same researchers. Regarding the first research question, the researchers found that English and Persian natives revealed some variations in their suggestion strategies. The results of the study also revealed that Iranian participants' gender proved to play a significant role in the production of several suggestion strategies including let's. to-clauses and yes-no questions.

2.3. Verbal Intelligence

Verbal intelligence plays a crucial role in the efficacy of suggestion speech acts within an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. According to Sternberg (1985), verbal intelligence is comprised of linguistic skills, such as vocabulary, syntax, and semantics, which are essential in effectively conveying a message. In particular, EFL learners with higher verbal intelligence are likely to generate more accurate and contextually appropriate speech acts (Ellis, 2008). Moreover, studies on pragmatics and speech acts have found a positive correlation between verbal intelligence and the ability to perform various speech acts (Taguchi, 2008). As such, exploring the impact of verbal intelligence on suggestion speech acts in an EFL context could provide valuable insights into the development of pragmatic competence and pedagogical strategies for language learners.

3. Statement of the Problem

Suggesting is one of the speech acts we abundantly use in our daily interactions. We receive suggestions from different people: we may receive personal suggestions from our friends or relatives; we may get professional suggestions from doctors or professors. "Suggestions also arise in educational environments such as a class in which students ask for teachers' help and hints" (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011, p. 152).

Despite the myriad number of suggestions we encounter in our daily conversations, the literature is remarkably slim concerning studies concerned with this speech act (Fernandez Guerra & Martinez-Flor, 2005).

Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate this kind of speech act in terms of three factors, namely, *language proficiency, gender, and verbal intelligence* to uncover how Iranian EFL learners employ speech act of suggestion and to shed some light on the likely irregularities observed in their production of suggestion speech act.

3.1. Purpose of the Study

Even though various speech acts have been investigated in different cultures, we still need to attend to more speech act studies in various cultures. The present study is a contribution to such a need. This study aims at investigating Iranian EFL learners' suggestion speech acts concerning factors such as *language proficiency*, *gender,* and *verbal intelligence*.

Therefore, it seeks to discover whether these factors influence students' choice of employing different forms of suggestion speech act or not. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is, firstly, to investigate if learners with different language proficiency levels produce different suggestion forms. Secondly, this study aims at exploring the relationship between gender and the production of suggestion speech acts. Thirdly, it seeks to probe if learners with different verbal intelligence levels perform differently in using suggestion forms.

3.2. Research Questions

Given the relevance of pragmatics in language learning, this research paper aims to investigate the association between suggestion speech acts and language proficiency, gender, and verbal intelligence among Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The focus on suggestion speech acts allows for the exploration of how learners navigate the sociolinguistic aspects of communication and employ appropriate pragmatic strategies when making suggestions. This study entails the following research questions:

RQ_1: Is there any significant difference among EFL learners of different proficiency levels in their use of suggestion forms?

RQ_2: Is there any significant difference between EFL males and females in their use of suggestion forms?

RQ_3: Is there any significant difference among learners of different verbal intelligence levels in their use of suggestion forms?

By investigating these research questions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between language proficiency, gender, verbal intelligence, and pragmatic competence in the context of suggestion speech acts. The findings of this research have

practical implications for language educators, as they can inform the design of instructional materials and strategies that foster pragmatic development and enhance learners' communicative competence. Additionally, the study expands the existing body of literature by focusing on the specific dynamics of suggestion speech acts within the Iranian EFL learner population, providing valuable insights into cross-cultural pragmatic competence.

4. Methodology

The current study was conducted drawing upon the following research methodology.

4.1. Research Design

This study is primarily a comparative-causal investigation. Similar to correlational research, a causal-comparative study looks for relationships between variables. This kind of study seeks to ascertain the reasons for or effects of existing variations between or among groups of people or individuals (Cohen et al, 2011). This type of study is effective for describing a link between two or more variables since the researcher may observe two or more variables at the same time. proficiency levels, suggestion speech acts, and gender were the variables that needed to be examined.

4.2. Participants

Some 105 English learners from Isfahan English institutes were selected for this study. They included 52 males and 53 females aged from 18 to 33. They were either university graduates or university students, all non-English majors. The rationale behind choosing university students is that in most studies carried out on speech acts, the participants had been university students, thus, for the sake of comparability of the results of this study with the findings of the other studies carried out around the world; it was decided to collect the data from a sample of a similar population i.e., university students.

None of them had visited an English-speaking country. The books that they studied were Top Notch series. Top Notch series consists of 12 textbooks on the whole, written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher, and published in the United States of America by Pearson Longman Incorporation in 2006. They attended English classes three times a week.

4.3. Instruments

Three types of instruments were used in this study. First, to gauge the initial proficiency of the participants, Oxford Placement Test (OPT, Allen, 2004) was administered. Second, to determine the participants' levels of

verbal intelligence, the verbal scale of Wechsler's Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) (1981) was used. The Farsi version of the WAIS Vocabulary subsection used in the present study consists of 40 words. This translated version was developed by AzmoonPadid Institute (1993) in Tehran, Iran. The Alpha Cronbach for the vocabulary subsection in the present study was 0.68. The reliability coefficient (internal consistency) for the Verbal IQ is .97. The vocabulary subtest correlates highly (.91-.95) with the Verbal scale of the WAIS. The concurrent validity of WAIS was established based on a high correlation with other valid intelligence scales, ranging from 78 to 89 (Silva, 2008).

Finally, a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to gather data about participants' use of different suggestion forms. According to Cohen (1996), one of the means to glean pragmatic data is (Discourse Completion Task) DCT and if it is prepared appropriately, it reveals how respondents activate their pragmatic knowledge (Martinez-Flor, 2006). The DCT (see Appendix) was adopted from Pishghadam and Sharafadini's (2011) study. It consisted of six suggestion-eliciting situations and participants were asked to put themselves in each situation and to assume that they would say something. They were also asked to read each situation carefully before they responded. They were asked to write in English what they would say. Although the DCT had been piloted and used previously, it was piloted to 17 EFL learners again by the researcher to guard against any possible ambiguous item.

4.4. Procedures

At the onset of the study, Oxford Placement Test (OPT, Allen, 2004) was used to divide the subjects into three language proficiency levels. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) consisted of listening and grammar sections. However, the grammar one was only used. The OPT test was a multiple-choice task and the completion duration was sixty minutes. The test has long been reported to enjoy acceptable reliability for different nationalities across the globe. The test had 100 multiple-choice items.

To measure the verbal intelligence of the subjects, the verbal scale of Wechsler's Adult Intelligence Scale (1981) was used. The Farsi version of the WAIS Vocabulary subsection used in the present study consists of 40 words. This translated version was developed by Azmoon Padid Institute (1993) in Tehran, Iran. The Verbal Intelligence Test was administered during which each participant was presented with 1 word at a time and asked to explain each word's meaning verbally. The examiner rates the responses with a 0, 1, or 2 depending on how well the participant

defines the word. Therefore, the scores can range from 0 to 80 (Wechsler,1997).

Finally, the DCT was given to the subjects. They were required to finish it within 15 minutes. The necessary instruction was offered by the researcher. To classify the suggestion forms produced by the participants, Jiang's (2006) taxonomy of the suggestion speech act was used. This entailed nine suggestion forms based on their grammatical features:

- Let's ...
- Modals and semi-modals
  You have to. . .
  You need to. . .
  *You * need to. . .*
  You should. . .
  You shouldn't. . .
  You ought to. . .
  You must. . .
  You can...
  You could. . .
  You might. . .
  You're supposed to. . .
  You'd/had better. . .

- Wh-questions
  Why don't you... .?
  Why not. . .?
  How about . . .?
  What about . . .?

- Conditionals
  If I were. . .
  If you. . .

- Performatives
  suggest/recommend/advise/propose
  suggestion/recommendation/advice/proposal

- Pseudo cleft structures
  What... .is. . .
  All... .is. . .
  One thing you could do is. . .
  Another thing to keep in mind is. . .
  One of the most important things to remember is. . .

- Extraposed to-clauses
  It might be. . . to. . .

It might not be. . . to. . .
It is * to. . .
It never hurts/. . .won't hurt/. . .wouldn't hurt to. . .

- Yes/ no questions
  Have you thought of/about . . .?
  Would you consider . . .?

- Imperatives

4.5. Data Analysis

At the data collection stage, the frequency of each suggestion form was calculated and assessed qualitatively. Also, three Chi-square tests were used to understand whether language proficiency, gender, and verbal intelligence moderated participants' utilization of different suggestion forms.

5. Results

Before delving into the three research questions, the percentage of each suggestion form along with a bar graph that depicts the distribution of each form are provided.

Table 1. *Frequency and Percentage of Suggestion Forms by Iranian EFL Learners*

Suggestion forms	Iranian EFL learners' frequency	Percentage
Let's	5	1.0%
Modals and semi-modals	242	47.8%
Wh-questions	8	1.6%
Conditionals	35	6.9%
Performatives	75	14.8%
Pseudo cleft structures	0	0%
Extraposed to-clauses	0	0%
Yes/ no questions	22	4.3%
Imperatives	119	23.5%

As Table 1 shows, except for "pseudo cleft structures" and "Extraposed to-clauses" which were not attempted by Iranian EFL learners, other suggestion forms have been used, albeit with remarkably different frequencies. A quick look at Table 1 reveals that the biggest share of suggestion forms that Iranian EFL learners employed pertains to "modals and semi-modals" with 47.8%, followed by "imperatives" (23.5%) and

"performatives"(14.8%). A bar graph depicting how Iranian EFL learners employed different suggestion forms has been presented below.
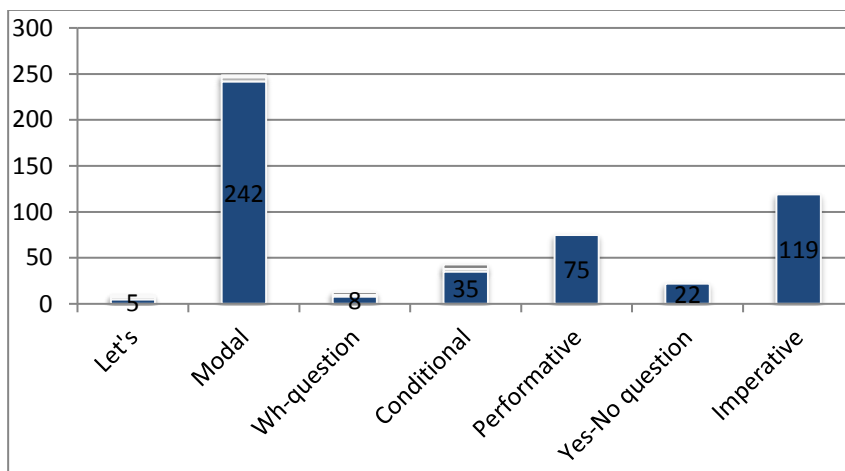

Figure 1. Bar graph showing Iranian EFL learners' utilization of different suggestion forms

5.1. Proficiency Levels and Use of Suggestion Forms

Concerning the first research question, a Chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between language proficiency level and utilization of suggestion forms. As seen in Table 2, the analysis revealed that the relationship between these variables was not significant, χ^2 (8, 493) = 11.50, p = .175. In other words, Iranian EFL learners of different language proficiency levels (intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced) showed no difference in their orientation towards using different suggestion forms.

Table 2. *Chi-Square Test for the relationship between language proficiency and utilization of suggestion forms*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.508[a]	8	.175
Likelihood Ratio	12.130	8	.145
Linear-by-Linear Association	.197 493	1	.657

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.55.

A bar graph has been provided below to clearly show the distribution of suggestion forms across different language proficiency levels.
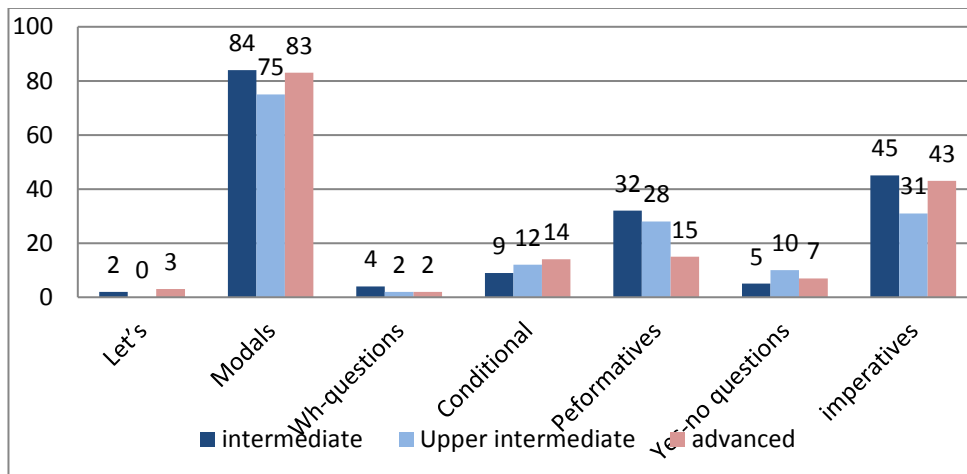

Figure 2. Bar graph showing utilization of suggestion forms across language proficiency

5.2. Gender and Use of Suggestion Forms

Concerning the second research question, a Chi-square test of independence in Table 3 revealed that there was a significant relationship between the gender and utilization of suggestion forms, χ^2 (4, 509) = 13.85, p = .008. Alternatively put, gender had an impact on the choice of suggestion form among the participants.

Table 3. *Chi-Square Tests for the relationship between gender and utilization of suggestion forms*

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.855[a]	4	.008
Likelihood Ratio	14.251	4	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.820 509	1	.093

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.55.

Inspecting the individual cells in Table 4, we see that only the adjusted residuals corresponding to the "performatives" category are above the cut-off point of 2, hence significant. That is to say, the proportion of

"performatives" as a form of making suggestions is significantly different between males and females in the current study.

Table 4. *Gender * suggestion Crosstabulation*

			Suggestion form					
			Modals	Conditionals	Performatives	Yes/no Qs	Imperatives	Total
Gender	**Male**	Count	125	11	22	11	52	221
		Expected Count	109.8	15.6	33.9	9.6	52.1	221
		Adjusted Residual	2.7	-1.6	-2.9*	.6	.0	
	Female	Count	128	25	56	11	68	288
		Expected Count	143.2	20.4	44.1	12.4	67.9	288
		Adjusted Residual	-2.7	1.6	2.9*	-.6	.0	
Total		Count	253	36	78	22	120	509
		Expected Count	253.0	36.0	78.0	22.0	120.0	509

5.3. Verbal Intelligence and Use of Suggestion Forms

Results of a Chi-square test of independence in Table 5 revealed that there was a significant relationship between verbal intelligence and utilization of suggestion forms, χ^2 (5, 296) = 19.01, p = .002. It means that verbal intelligence moderated the kind of suggestion form that the participants utilized.

Table 5. *Chi-Square Tests for the relationship between verbal intelligence and utilization of suggestion forms*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.016[a]	5	.002
Likelihood Ratio	18.596	5	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	.211	1	.646
N of Valid Cases	296		

To pinpoint where the greatest impact lies, the results of Crosstabulation in Table 6 are presented. As seen in the following table, the adjusted residuals corresponding to the "performative" and "imperative" categories are above the cut-off point of 2, hence significant. That is, the proportion of "performatives" and "imperatives" as forms of making suggestions are

significantly different between learners of high and low verbal intelligence levels.

Table 6. *Verbal Intelligence * suggestion Crosstabulation*

			Modals	wh-question	conditionals	performatives	yes/no Qs	imperatives	Total
VI	High	Count	80	5	9	36	6	75	211
		Expected Count	74.8	7.1	10.0	45.6	8.6	64.9	211
		Adjusted Residual	1.4	-1.5	-.6	-3.0*	-1.7	2.8*	
	Low	Count	25	5	5	28	6	16	85
		Expected Count	30.2	2.9	4.0	18.4	3.4	26.1	85
		Adjusted Residual	-1.4	1.5	.6	3.0*	1.7	-2.8*	
Total		Count	105	10	14	64	12	91	296
		Expected Count	105.0	10.0	14.0	64.0	12.0	91.0	296

The header spanning Suggestion forms covers Modals through imperatives.

6. Discussion

The discussion which follows aims to explore some possible interpretations of the results.

Question 1: Is there any significant difference among learners of different proficiency levels in their use of suggestion forms?

All learners, irrespective of the language proficiency levels, have predominantly opted for "Modals", "Imperatives" and "Performatives", which are among the most frequently used structures to make suggestions in the Persian language. It is noticeable that all EFL learners in this study have transferred language forms from their L1. Thus, this is opposed to Allami and Naimi (2010) who reported that upper intermediate learners had more instances of L1 samples. My study also contradicts previous findings (Pishghadam & Sharafadini, 2011) who asserted that upper intermediate and advanced learners had more instances of L1 transfer since they are in the middle of the process of constructing their interlanguage, and use their L1 as a linguistic resource to compensate for the existing gap in their interlanguage.

Another possible explanation for a lack of diversity in the suggestion-making data produced by the participants of this study might be the unpalatable fact that almost all the language institutes in the area where we conducted our study do not bother to administer regular placement tests

before the commencement of each semester so that their education could be beneficial down the line. For instance, "let's…" is by far the most frequently used structure for making suggestions and should be taught in ESL/EFL classes at an early stage of instruction (Jiang, 2006), but we observed that even the advanced participants had not chosen to use it much. This, in turn, might be because teachers may not raise students' consciousness of the various suggestion forms in the textbooks and how and when to use them, an important issue that has been ubiquitously discussed in the literature on L2 pragmatics (Thomas, 1983, cited in Sum-hung Li, 2010).

Question 2: Is there any significant difference between males and females in their use of suggestion forms?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, gender was a significant factor in the production of "performative" forms. Therefore, this finding agrees with that of other studies in which gender was a significant factor in making suggestions (Banerjee &Carrell, 1988; Pishghadam and Sharafadini, 2011). However, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research (Allami, 2006; Bryant Smith, 2009) which reported gender as a nonsignificant variable in nonnatives' production of speech acts. Interestingly, the results of this study directly contradict previous findings (Pishghadam and Sharafadini, 2011) according to which "males tend to utilize more direct strategies such as imperatives, whereas females employ more indirect suggestions like yes-no questions (p. 157)". Bearing in mind that "performatives" are among the commonly used suggestion-making forms in the Persian language, it could be said that females have transferred L1 forms to make suggestions in L2.

Question 3: Is there any significant difference among learners of different verbal intelligence levels in their use of suggestion forms?

Results of a Chi-square test of independence in chapter 4 revealed that there was a significant relationship between verbal intelligence and utilization of suggestion forms. It means that verbal intelligence moderated the kind of suggestion form that the participants utilized. Additionally, it was found that learners of high and low verbal intelligence performed significantly differently in terms of choosing "performative" and "imperative" forms. Learners of high language intelligence levels outperformed their counterparts considering the utilization of performative and imperatives structures. Although "let's" comprises a significant proportion of suggestion forms in the English natives' sample (Jiang, 2006), it was among the least frequent suggestion forms utilized by Iranian EFL learners of high verbal intelligence level. Once again, a possibly cogent reason could be the influence that learners' native language (i.e., The

Persian language) exerted on their choice of suggestion forms. It was observed that even in situations where learners could have utilized forms such as "let's", "you'd better" and "wh-questions" to sound, let's say, more native-like, they heavily relied on structures common in their L1 (i.e., imperatives and performatives), hence potential communication failures in L2 real life encounters. Therefore, this situation is not in line with Logsdon (2012)'s who stated that verbal intelligence is the ability to find suitable words and expressions in accomplishing goals such as persuasions, suggestions, encouragements, explanations, influence, etc.

7. Conclusions

The findings from the collected data revealed several significant factors in relation to the use of suggestion-making forms among Iranian EFL learners. Gender was found to have a notable influence on the preference for "performatives" as one of the suggestion forms, while language proficiency did not moderate learners' preference for any particular form. On the other hand, verbal intelligence emerged as a significant variable affecting learners' utilization of specific suggestion forms. Furthermore, the study uncovered that Iranian EFL learners tended to transfer structures from their first language (L1) when producing suggestion forms.

The observed patterns of learners' performance, including the relatively lower use of "lets" utterances and the higher use of "modals," "performatives," and "imperatives," can be attributed to cultural values. Eastern cultures, such as Iran and China, are characterized by high-context communication styles (Shang-chao, 2008) and a collectivistic orientation (Chang, 2008). In these cultures, preserving face and maintaining group harmony are highly valued. Consequently, individuals from these cultural backgrounds tend to prefer more indirect suggestion strategies compared to English native speakers. In contrast, Western cultures, characterized by low-context communication and an individualistic orientation, tend to favor direct communication styles (Shang-chao, 2008). As cultural values are deeply ingrained in learners' identities, they naturally transfer their cultural communication styles into their second language (L2) suggestion strategies.

8. Implication

The conclusions of this study have important implications for pedagogy and language instruction. The findings highlight the significance of aligning expectations and perceptions of communication between Iranian and English native speakers. Successful communication between these groups requires an understanding of the different sociocultural norms and preferences that shape their communication styles. Therefore, syllabus

designers should consider incorporating materials and activities that raise learners' awareness of how native speakers realize specific speech acts, particularly in relation to the production of suggestions. Pedagogical materials should aim to engage learners consciously and provide opportunities for authentic practice using natural language materials, as suggested by Intachakra (2004).

Despite the use of the Top-Notch series, which represents a more advanced generation of English textbooks, the findings indicate that students' samples of suggestion-making predominantly reflect their first language (Persian) structures. This finding supports the notion proposed by Jiang (2006) that classroom teachers need to recognize the limitations of the chosen textbooks and supplement them with additional materials that enhance students' learning. For teaching pragmatics, the use of corpora containing authentic spoken language can facilitate the connection between language forms and functions. Classroom tasks should prioritize naturally occurring conversations over drills and artificial dialogues. By exposing students to more authentic conversations, their awareness of socio-cultural factors such as register differences, interlocutor relationships, and cultural preferences can be developed (Jiang, 2006).

These implications emphasize the importance of incorporating authentic materials and real-life communication situations in language instruction. By exposing learners to genuine language use, they can develop a deeper understanding of the sociocultural aspects of communication and improve their pragmatic competence. Additionally, teachers should be mindful of supplementing textbooks with relevant materials that address learners' specific needs and help bridge the gap between language learning and real-world communication. By adopting these pedagogical approaches, educators can better equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate intercultural communication successfully. Future research could explore the effectiveness of incorporating corpora and naturally occurring conversations in language classrooms to further enhance learners' pragmatic awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

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